



August 2012

Dear Stakeholder,

Like all of you, the Department has remained very busy this summer. After the passage of the budget and start of the new Fiscal Year, we have focused on highlighting community programs and services for seniors and individuals with disabilities.

For example, I participated in a [bill signing ceremony](#) with Lt. Governor Kim Guadagno. The statute, formerly bill [S-618](#), requires school bus drivers to use flashing red lights when picking up or dropping off passengers with disabilities and requires drivers of vehicles approaching the school bus to stop at least 25 feet when the bus that has activated its flashing lights. The new law establishes penalties for violators, consistent with those currently in effect for child passengers on school buses.

I also stood with Governor Chris Christie as he signed a [Drug Court expansion pilot initiative](#) at the Trenton Rescue Mission, where we were able to [meet and talk with](#) several people who have benefited from the program. The Governor has made clear that drug offenders should have an opportunity to be treated and recover from their addictions rather than be incarcerated. At the event he said, “We will no longer simply warehouse individuals in prison who are not a threat to society while the underlying cause of their criminality goes unaddressed. And we won’t wait for them to come to the conclusion that they need treatment on their own. With this legislation we are building on our record of reducing recidivism, reclaiming lives by breaking the vicious cycle of crime and addiction, and doing so in a way that is less costly and more effective in getting results.”

And, Division of Disability Services’ Director, Joseph Amoroso, participated in a [ramp ribbon cutting](#) at the Christ Care Unit Missionary Baptist Church in Sicklerville. Last March, three, regional food pantries were awarded about \$5,000 each to renovate or retrofit their buildings to improve access for individuals using mobility devices. Christ Care was the first to [complete its work](#), with the help of a local contractor. The other award recipients were The Lord’s Pantry, Trinity United Methodist Church in Hackettstown and Fixer of Hearts Food Pantry, Community Church Fixer of Hearts in North Brunswick.

On our Facebook page, we [recognized](#) the New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies’ award to Governor Chris Christie for his leadership in fighting stigma and we [posted pictures](#) of the Homefront Family Preservation Center’s 21st Birthday celebration, .

On July 23rd, the Task Force on the Closure of State Developmental Centers finalized its binding recommendations. You'll recall that this Task Force was created by statute in December 2011. It was charged by the Governor and Legislature with reviewing several factors related to the state's seven developmental centers and making a decision to close "one or more". The group's [report](#), released today, identifies North Jersey and Woodbridge Developmental Centers for closure within five years. The Department will immediately develop a comprehensive closure plan that is resident-focused and advances our commitment to respecting the rights of people in the developmental centers to live in the community, if they so choose. We'll provide updates on this initiative regularly on our [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page.

This month we continue to highlight community living. Members of my executive staff and I each have events that include attending a senior art exhibit, touring a medical day program, visiting a behavioral health center and a new group home opening.

There are about 20 stakeholder meetings scheduled in August. I look forward to seeing and working with each of you.

Regards,

Jennifer Velez

Commissioner